
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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BRACEYS LOOKOUT & HASSANS WALLS

TOPIC

OUR JULY WALK

**BRACEYS LOOKOUT and
HASSANS WALLS at
LITHGOW**

Friday 20th July 2012

Near the southern end of the Western Ghats or the Sahyadri Mountain Range in India, on the Haemavati River between Bangalore and Mangalore is the region of Hassan. There are many ancient temples here with high intricately carved stone walls; these became known as the 'Walls of Hassan' in colonial times. It is thought that Governor Macquarie, when travelling across the Great Dividing Range along the Coxs Road in 1815, was put in mind of those Indian features when he saw the impressive ornately sculptured cliff lines above present day Old Bowenfells and assigned the name 'Hassans Walls'. Today we will stand atop those cliffs and take in the majestic panorama stretching into the distance.

Following a night of still air and clear skies there is a thick frost covering the ground when fourteen walkers meet in Finlay Avenue at Lithgow. This of course means we are blessed with perfect conditions for our walk; clear blue skies and not a breath of wind. In her usual quiet, efficient manner Libby quickly has us organised into a reduced number of vehicles for the shuffle to our starting point at the coming together of Bridge and Esbank Streets.



Winter in the Bush

With his extensive local knowledge Fred Roberts leads the walk today and I am back in my usual spot as whip at the rear of the group giving Libby the unusual freedom to move among the group. I count off the twelve walkers as they approach the start of the Esbank Track constructed in 1998. Hang on a moment, we had fourteen back at Finlay Avenue; surely we haven't lost two already. Not so. Anne and Don Clarke decided to drive up to Braceys Lookout and meet us there; a rather clever move.

The track rises very steeply, proving to be a very good heart starter early in the day, and those feeling the effects of the frosty morn are very quickly warmed. As we gain elevation the view back to the town centre reveals an interesting elongated vee of buildings formed by Esbank and Bridge Streets, framed by trees on either side of the track and with a backdrop of tree-clad hills beyond. We clamber up a couple of rocky embankments and emerge onto a gentler sloping track which allows us to gain a little composure before meeting a very relaxed Anne and Don at Braceys Lookout. This lookout is named after the Bracey family who had extensive commercial interests in Lithgow including a large department store founded in 1886 which traded for more than 100 years.

Here Fred kindly points out many historic sites and other points of interest visible from this elevated position. The City of Lithgow, sitting

snugly in the valley, took its name from William Lithgow, Auditor-General of NSW in 1822 and Chairman of the Land Board in 1826. It has a rich history of industrial booms and subsequent busts with associated large increases and dramatic decreases in population, yet it has managed to survive these crises. Fred mentions the large proportion of street names which reflect armaments, theatres of war and heavy industry such as Bren, Martini, Vickers and Tobruk, Amiens, Rabaul along with Cupro, Ferro and Gas Works; all relating to the influences on and nature of manufacturing that took place in Lithgow.

We take advantage of the facilities here, which have recently been very well refurbished, to pause for morning tea.

Suitably refreshed we continue on, our numbers back to the original fourteen. We are now walking along the access road which allows people to walk two or three abreast and catch up with news of activities completed and planned. The volume of the various conversations however is no match for the raucous calls of the many Wattlebirds flitting through the tree tops. We pass a couple of large rock formations in this area. The first appeared as two domed pagodas joined at their base, embellished with horizontal crevices and projections. The second was flat topped with several thin ledges extending from one side. Both were decorated with rust coloured lichen.

The open forest here contains Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) growing in a more spreading form than it does in sheltered gullies. Also present are Silver Top Ash (*Eucalyptus sieberi*), their trunks and major branches clad in furrowed bark, almost black in colour, rising to smooth white upper branches; their rustling foliage displays a silvery glint when touched by the sun. Illuminating the forest floor are the golden flower heads of a host of Sunshine Wattles (*Acacia terminalis*) while a lone and obviously impatient Pink Matchhead (*Comesperma ericinum*) is already expanding its buds ready to ignite in bloom a couple of months before schedule. The predominant Banksia in this area is the Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*

var. spinulosa) carrying many deep golden-yellow flower spikes each with hundreds of glossy black styles or 'hairpins' from which the common name derives.

Soon we arrive at the intersection with Hassans Walls Road. Here Fred informs us that during the Second World War there were gun emplacements near the top of Scenic Hill and on the hill above the present hospital to protect the Small Arms Factory. There were also dummy guns installed somewhere in this area and near the cemetery west of the town to dupe any attacker; Fred has not been able to find any remaining evidence here of those dummy guns.

We turn right and continue along Hassans Walls Road then divert to the old Hartley trig point which is 1143 metres above sea level. Here we are afforded magnificent views into the surrounding valleys and across to the western cliff lines sitting above the tree-clad talus slopes. The many farm dams in the valley, all brim full, reflect the clear sky; sapphire pools in the tawny winter pastures. Looming above the ridgeline is the distinctive double-humped profile of Mount Banks. The low wind-clipped heath on the hillside here forms a glorious tapestry of muted pastel colours, a splendid example of Mother Nature's artistry.

On returning to the road we are treated to a rather surreal view to the northwest; white vapour plumes rising from the obscured power station cooling towers add a primeval touch to the scene. Beside the road here are many examples of the Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) their reddish-orange flower spikes carrying extended orange-tipped red styles. Also present here is the Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) with their small yellow flowers and narrow leaves which have distinct white undersides. The nectar-rich flowers of the Banksias have attracted many Honeyeaters to the area. One, whose distinctive song we first hear and which we then sight is the White-eared Honeyeater with its conspicuous white ear patch on a black face, light yellow abdomen and long olive green tail; a delight to both the eye and ear.

The road now meanders back into open forest and contours along the hillside. Rocky outcrops appear on the upper side and the land slopes gently into a shady gully on the lower. Soon we arrive at the turn-off to Hassans Walls Lookout. For the benefit of those who have trouble recognising arrowhead symbols a large cutout hand, bright yellow in colour, has been added to the direction sign; thumb extended upward and long finger pointing the way. We make our way past some Dwarf She Oak (*Allocasuarina nana*) onto the rock platform which is Hassans Walls Lookout. At 1130 metres above sea level this is said to be the highest designated lookout in the Blue Mountains, a cursory study of topographical maps seems to bear this out; it is certainly near the pinnacle for panoramic views.

To experience, close at hand, the grandeur of the rock formations alone is worth the visit to this site. To squeeze (well it was a squeeze for me) through a narrow throat in a pagoda-like rock into a small cave and stand at its gaping mouth to take in the view framed by precipitous cliffs. To take in the magnificent spectacle of Padleys Pedestal standing in splendid isolation near the end of this ridge. To view the pillars of rock weatherworn into intricate shapes, a stone table sitting atop a central column, rugged cliff faces pockmarked with small caves and crevices, rock ledges surmounted with features which allude to the gargoyles and grotesques which adorn ancient castles. There is a wondrous array of natural sculptures on display here.

Looking beyond the rugged beauty of these rocky crags to the fields near the base of these cliffs the eye is drawn to a line of tall conifers perfectly mirrored in the smooth water of the farm dam beside which they stand. Close by the old forty bends route can be discerned as traffic is seen, but barely heard, moving along the new alignment of the highway. One's gaze is then attracted to the undulating pasture lands of the Hartley, Kanimbla and Megalong Valleys and the surrounding mountains including Mounts Wilson, Banks, York, Bindo, Blaxland and Tarana; a splendid panorama.

This vantage point not only allows one to observe these physical surroundings but also presents the opportunity to look into our past. Fred mentions there are the graves of some convicts and of a soldier close to one of the steel towers of the 132kV transmission line visible below. Indeed there was a convict 'stockade' below Hassans Walls (one of several along this section of the route) during construction on Mitchell's suggested new road from Mt Victoria to Bathurst, a more direct line than Coxs Road, in the mid to late 1830s. Unlike other stockades along this route Hassans Walls did not have an enclosed compound, convicts were initially housed in portable boxes and later in slab huts; there were nearby barracks for military guards. Coins, buttons, a military buckle and other convict era artefacts have been unearthed at this site.

Time now to eat and it was a delight to have a number of visitors drop by to share lunch with us. Geoff Kelly, who for various reasons has not walked with us for some time, drove up with his wife Jenny; it was wonderful to see them both and share some time with them. Also arriving to join us were Libby's daughter Beth and daughter-in-law Tina with grand daughters Pippa and Molly. Pippa and her mum Tina joined us for the rest of the walk while Molly accompanied Auntie Beth who drove down to meet us at our finishing point.

We continue along Hassans Walls Road and divert to the left onto a fire trail which initially follows close to the cliff line. Climbing another rock outcrop gives us great views back along the 'Walls' and reveals a long vertical crack in an adjacent cliff; a house-sized monolith will topple into the valley if and when this eventually gives way. Apparently mining subsidence has caused destabilisation in this area forcing the closure of walking tracks below the cliff line.

At the crest of a steep pinch the track swings away from the cliff line and it is now fairly level walking. Soon we are at a point overlooking the town once more and begin our descent past a group of the unfortunately named Prickly Shaggy Pea (*Podolobium*

ilicifolium) with their small glossy sharp-pointed leaves; they appear to thrive in this rather poor-looking soil. The track is rather steep and the surface quite loose but we all make it safely to lower ground. Fred then leads us past a rather forbidding looking wartime concrete bunker, its purpose uncertain, and we emerge onto a grassy field. Here Pippa is reunited with her baby sister Molly and they frolic together, giggling and squealing, on the grassy slope. Ah, the innocent exuberance of little children, enchanting to watch.

Anne and Don Clarke kindly invite us back to their nearby home where we indulge in a very pleasant afternoon tea to conclude a great day exploring the spectacular ridges and escarpment above Lithgow.

At temples in Southern India the Walls of Hassan carry elaborate carvings dedicated to a host of deities. Here at Lithgow, Mother Nature has spent tens of thousands of years carving intricate patterns into the sandstone cliffs, creating an incredible temple to natural grandeur - Hassans Walls.

John Cardy

OUR AUGUST WALK

Friday 17th August 2012

Stunning Rainforest, Exquisite Cascades and Waterfalls, Impressive Shelter Caves

Sassafras Gully and Magdala Creek at Springwood

The group last visited this venue in August 2000. On experiencing the sublime beauty of this circular walk one wonders why we have not been back for twelve years; it is perhaps the prettiest rainforest and creekline walk in the mountains. The walk is approximately 9km and is of medium grade, there is a descent and subsequent ascent of 250 metres; the scenery on offer however makes every one of those metres worthwhile.

Meet in Picnic Point Reserve at the eastern end of Valley Rd in Springwood at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 8.00am. If approaching from the east drive through the Springwood

Shopping Centre and continue along Macquarie Rd, do not go under the railway subway. If approaching from the west turn right off the Great Western Hwy at the lights at Ferguson Rd, proceed under the railway subway and turn immediately right into Macquarie Rd. Then turn left into Homedale St and left into Valley Rd, keep to the right of the centre island as indicated (a brown and white sign here indicates 'Picnic Point to Sassafras Gully') and proceed down the hill to the Picnic Point Reserve.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea and plenty of water.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0418 646 487 if you need to leave a message

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 21st September – The network of historic tracks below the Hydro Majestic at Medlow Bath (Note change of venue)

Friday 19th October – Dunns Swamp east of Rylstone

Friday 16th November – Lockley Pylon off the Mount Hay Road at Leura

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help, even for a short time, would be appreciated both by the other workers and by the native vegetation.

10th August at Wynne Reserve

14th September at Farrer Road (Outside 'Balangara')

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details